Combat Baby, Come Back

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Combat Baby, Come Back

by foodtruck

Summary

Admittedly, Stan’s head was a little…all over the place. But he was pretty damn sure Ford hadn’t been dressed like that ten minutes ago when he’d been sucked up into the portal. Right?

Notes

this is for all of the lovely stancest folks on twitter, whose notifications i have been lurking in for weeks. your art is amazing, your headcanons are fantastic, and you all inspired this, so i hope you like it!

title from combat baby by metric ★

See the end of the work for more notes

“No…no, no, no!”

Stan was going to be sick. There was really no other way to describe the roiling, acidic feeling churning in his gut and climbing up his throat. His ears were ringing now, and not just from the ominous whirring and crackling of the giant portal that had *just sucked up his fucking brother.*

The diary or whatever the hell hit the ground as he lunged for the lever a few feet away, straining to hold it in the “on” position. Was this the on position? Is that how this thing worked? It had to be, right?!

“I just got him back! I can’t lose him again!” he yelled, panic making his voice wobble.

But there was also so much goddamn adrenaline racing through his veins. It made everything feel all at once entirely too sharp and softly blurred around the edges. The air tasted like static, which wasn’t something Stan knew had a fucking taste, but he was also so focused on forcing the lever to click back into place, that he didn’t immediately notice the light blooming again on the side of the room.

Something cracked, like lightning striking sand, and Stan jerked his head around to see the portal sputtering back to life.

“H-Holy shit! Holy shit!” he breathed. It was working? Sweet Moses, it looked like it was working!

When he tried to step away from the lever, it shuddered ominously, clicking back towards the other side, and the hellacious blue glow in the portal flickered in turn. Choking on swears and panic, Stan wrapped both arms around the lever and threw all his weight and adrenaline-spiked strength into reclaiming those few threatening clicks.

“Stanford?! Stanford, can you hear me?!” he shouted. Either the floor or the worn soles of his boots were too fucking smooth, and he kept slipping, threatening to trip and lose his hold on the lever.

The portal made more of that useless whirling, snapping noise. Ford’s voice didn’t follow.

Stan swallowed hard. He was distantly aware of how much his limbs were starting to shake, and somewhere just outside of what his stupid brain had room to process was a dull throbbing that was probably way worse than he was acknowledging.

But he couldn’t care about any of that right now. If there was even a sliver of a chance that Ford could come back through that spooky fucking hole, Stan had to hold out. He had to hold the door open.

“F-Ford, come on! If you’re there, you gotta come back!” He shouted, only realizing he was probably crying when his voice stuck, phlegmy and unsteady, in the back of his throat. He ignored that, too. “I-I’m sorry, all right?! Just come back! I—“

When a dark, person-shaped shadow coalesced within the light of the portal, Stan nearly slipped, scrabbling to keep his footing and maintain his grip on the lever.

And then all at once, it was just…over.

The portal sputtered out entirely, dark and silence rushing in so fast it made Stan dizzy.

Or maybe that was him finally falling on his ass when the lever stopped trying to fight its way into the off position. Didn't seem like it mattered anymore — it must have run out of juice?

Definitely didn't matter. None of it mattered.

Stan scrambled back onto his feet. "Ford!? Is that you? Fuck, are you okay?!"

He was babbling, he knew that, but he was also nearly within arm's reach before he realized that the person who had walked through the portal wasn't just dark because they were backlit by a swirling energy vacuum, but because they were dressed entirely in black.

Admittedly, Stan's head was a little…all over the place. But he was pretty damn sure Ford hadn't been dressed like that ten minutes ago when he'd been sucked up into the portal. Right?

Then the guy reached up and pulled the goofy cloth off his face, and Stan could just make out the familiar shape of his nose and the clef of his chin before he was fully and incapacitatingly overwhelmed by relief. It hit him so hard that his already kinda shitty vision swam, and he honestly thought he might throw up. Or maybe start sobbing, which would be even worse.

Stan didn't actually do either, thankfully. But it did distract him so completely, that he had only just managed to choke out another single, warbled, "Ford!" before a fist collided with the side of his face.

"Fuck!" he yelped, stumbling and telling himself it was mostly out of surprise. "Seriously? Still?!"

When the next swing came, he was ready for it, ducking under the fist with more instinct than conscious intent. But when he moved to retaliate, he faltered, catching himself just before he would have shoved his idiot brother. The portal wasn't spinning sickly blue light anymore, but he'd *just* watched Ford get sucked up into that thing because he'd pushed him too close. What if it kicked back on and he couldn't keep it lit this time?

Unsurprisingly, the hesitation cost him, and he wheezed when Ford's other fist connected with his stomach.

He was still reeling from how their first round of fighting had ended, but apparently his little dip in the portal had just riled Ford up for another round. Stan couldn't fully blame him for that, cause he was pretty sure he'd have come back out swinging, too. But it was kinda hard to be that understanding when you were getting your ass kicked.

Well fine. If Ford was still itching for a fight, Stan would give him a fucking fight. It was his goddamn fault they had gotten into this mess in the first place! With his stupid, spooky cellar of sci-fi garbage, and calling him out here to get Stan's hopes up just to—

With a frustrated yell, he lunged forward and shoulder checked Ford hard enough to send him stumbling. And when the portal remained silent and still, Stan swung for his familiar nose.

Ford managed to lean back just in time to avoid his knuckles, but the agitated spike of Stan's anger subsequently sputtered out into wild confusion when he got his first full look at his brother's face.

Sure, the aforementioned nose and chin were in the same recognizable shapes. But this close, it was easier to make out how the lines around Ford's mouth and eyes were deeper than the exhaustion he'd been wearing twenty minutes ago. And with the cowl pulled aside, Stan could see that most of the color had been leached out of Ford's hair.

He looked…*old.*

He also still looked pissed.

Stan really only had a moment to realize that something truly fucked up had happened before he was tackled to the ground. He would deny it until the day he died, but when his back hit the floor, that distant, dull throb at the edge of his awareness flared into such a sharp, vicious pain that he yipped like a kicked dog.

That, at least, seemed to shake Ford out of some of his single minded rage. Or at least, Stan assumed that's what happened, since he didn't immediately get his nose broken. He could feel that Ford had gone still, but frankly, his own vision had gone squinted and more than a little blurry again as he grabbed at his now not-so-dully throbbing shoulder.

"S-Sonuvabitch!" he hissed between his teeth.

Something brushed against the edge of his hair, startling him into forcing his eyes back open, but he only caught the briefest glimpse of surprise cutting across Ford's weird, aged face, before his word was spinning again.

"What th—hey! The hell are you doin'?!"

When he was forcefully rolled onto his stomach, Stan growled and immediately tried to shove himself back upright. And he honestly wasn't sure what to do with the fact that Ford just pressed a hand down on the back of his head and held him soundly against the floor. He wasn't any stranger to having his face pressed against the ground or anything, but half an hour ago, Stan was absolutely positive it wouldn't have taken any effort at all to throw Ford off of him.

Now, Ford didn't budge *at all* no matter how he tried to twist or buck.

"Would you stop squirming?" Ford snapped behind him, the annoyance in his voice more familiar than his face, as he bore more of his weight down across Stan's back.

“Would you let me up?” he snapped back, telling himself that he had just over exerted himself trying to keep the stupid portal on. He was just tired, that was all. He’d *seen* Ford when he got here — too skinny, too strung out, too paranoid. And if said stupid portal had sucked the youth out of him, he should be like. Frail or some shit, right?

The point was that he wasn’t getting his ass kicked by an old, paranoid shut in! He was just worn out.

Stan was quickly ripped away from that particular thread of mental gymnastics by the feeling of fingers skimming along the edge of the pulsing burn on his shoulder.

“Watch it!” he said, flinching away from the touch as best he could with limited leverage.

“How did you burn yourself again?” Ford demanded.

It took a moment to shake Ford’s hand off of his head — and he would not consider the fact that Ford had, most likely, just let him do it — but when he did, Stan shot a scowl over his shoulder at him.

“ *You* kicked me into that, jackass!” He said, watching a weird little expression sink down over Ford’s even weirder face. “And what the fuck happened to you, huh? You were gone for like…fifteen minutes, max, and now you look like Pa!”

Ford didn’t immediately answer, staring at him in a way that Stan recognized but couldn’t quite place. It was intense, uncomfortably so, and it wasn’t until he watched his brother turn that same stare on the back of his shoulder and then sweep it across the room that he realized it was the same face he used to make at his homework. A problem that he hadn’t solved yet.

He rolled his eyes. “You gonna let me up sometime this century, Poindexter?”

Ford’s eyes snapped back to him, lingering on his hair and the burn like he couldn’t help himself. But he did at least climb off his back, so Stan bit back the comment that had been starting on his tongue. He did, however, complain loudly when he was unceremoniously hauled onto his feet and yanked across the basement.

“Do you have any idea how dangerous it was to turn the portal back on?” Ford said, tightening his grip on his arm when Stan tried to yank it away. Did the stupid portal take Ford’s hair color in exchange for grip strength, what the hell!?

“Even if that thing ever turned all the way off in the first place, how about a ‘thank you, Stanley’ for holding it open long enough to rescue your ass?!”

“Thank you?” Ford repeated, tugging them to a stop. Still not loosening his damn grip, though. Stan was this close to twisting himself out of his jacket entirely.

“Yeah, thank you! That’s what a normal person says when someone helps them out, Stanford,” he said, using his worst impression of his brother just to see if his mouth would turn down hard at the corners like they always did when they were kids and he got annoyed enough.

They did, too! And Stan nearly laughed at the way it looked on his familiar-unfamiliar face.

But what was decidedly less familiar was the anger that followed. Not that he hadn't seen Ford angry, of course. He had the bruises and a fucked up shoulder to show for that. But this was the kind of anger that Stan usually saw before someone pulled a knife or a tire iron on him.

Tension raced out into his limbs so fast it made his muscles ache.

Whatever he was expecting — to be punched again, maybe? Did Ford *have* a knife? Would he actually try and take a stab at him if he did? — it didn't come. He watched a muscle jump in Ford's stupidly sharp jawline and heard him take a deep breath. When he spoke, his voice was even.

Low, and angry, but even.

"Putting aside the fact that you pushed me into the portal to begin with, Stanley, what you did could very well have caused this entire dimension to collapse, killing everyone and everything in it. So no, I won't be thanking you for proving, yet again, that you can't be trusted near anything of value or import."

Heat, the itchy, prickly kind, clawed its way up the back of Stan's neck, and a god awful, sharp thing twisted around in his chest. He smothered it the way that always worked best.

"Fuck you!" he spat, clinging to the anger when it flared up in him like a lifeline and twisting his arm out of Ford's grip so hard it made his elbow twinge. "How about you find someone else to give a shit the next time you need somebody to clean up your mess?"

Ford scowled at him, but didn't, thankfully, try and stop him when he stormed past him for the stairs. Annoyingly, Stand did hear him following him back up to the ground level of his weird ass shack.

"Where are you going, Stanley?"

"I'm leaving! Have fun with your research and your portal and your fucking liver spots!" he said, biting out a curse when he took a corner too fast in the now-dark house and ran his leg into some stupidly placed table of creepy knickknacks. Jesus Christ! How many injuries was he going to get in this place?!

"Oh, of course!" Ford called after him. "How could I forget? Ruining things and skipping town has always been your MO, hasn't it?"

Stan whirled on him faster than Ford expected if the hitch of his brows was anything to go by.

"Oh yeah? And what's yours, then, Stanford, huh? Blaming everybody else around you when shit doesn't magically go your way? The hell even is that thing down there? If it's so goddamn dangerous, why do you have it?!"

Ford didn't have an immediate rebuttal that time, and his ears turned pink the way they always did when he was embarrassed.

Stan had hit a nerve.

Good.

"Yeah, that's what I thought. Leave it to you to get in over your head and make it everybody else's problem, Sixer."

"*You* ruined *my* life," Ford hissed. Because of course — *of course* — it always came back to that, didn't it?

It didn't matter if it had been an accident.

It didn't matter how many times he apologized.

It didn't matter that he'd taken himself out of the picture so he couldn't do any more damage.

It didn't matter that he came running the second his brother asked.

And it didn't matter that he'd saved his fucking life down in that basement.

He was never going to be anything to Ford again but this.

"Sure," he said, smirking lopsidedly at him. He was so fucking tired. "Consider it a two for one special. Can't wait to hear what else is my fault in, what? Another ten years?"

Ford didn't speak, jaw set in a hard line, and Stan snorted softly. Figures.

"Have a nice life, Stanford," he said, and he didn't even slam the door behind him when he left.

The fact that it was pitch black and fucking freezing outside sucked a little of the cool guy exit out of him, though.

"Fuck," he muttered, yanking his jacket tighter around him and wincing when the fabric dragged across his fucked up shoulder.

He stomped out into the snow, trudging through the boot prints he had left on the way in, now half full with fresh powder. But it wasn't until he reached the STNLYMBL that he realized he'd left his damn bag inside the cabin.

"Son of a bitch," he whispered, trying to remember what all he'd crammed into that bag. Had it been anything important? The idea of crawling back to get his single bag of measly possessions made him want to gag.

Oh Chris, he hadn't left his keys, had he?

Frantically, he patted himself down and shuddered out a breath when he found them still tucked in his jacket pocket. Okay. He had his keys. His wallet, light as that was, was still in his back pocket. He would just make do. Maybe he could lift some new clothes from someplace on his way out of town.

Preferably on his way to somewhere *warm.* And Rico probably wouldn't go looking as far as SoCal to fuck him up.

There. He even had a plan! Nowhere to look but forward.

Getting in behind the wheel of his car felt good and bad in equal, wobbly measure. He… hadn't really thought he'd be back here, settling back in this way, quite so soon. But he should have, right? That was on him. Because Ford was a prick, but he wasn't wrong. Fucking things up and skipping town was exactly how he'd spent the last fifteen plus years of his life.

But at least his car was there for him. Had been the whole time. Sure, in a perfect world, he wouldn't be living out of the El Diablo, but at least it was his. His car wasn't going to kick him to the fucking curb for making a mistake or insult him for trying to help.

And just because the universe never missed an opportunity to spit in his face, his beautiful, beloved car sputtered pathetically when he turned the key, the engine refusing to turn over.

"No…no, no,no," he whispered, cranking the key harder in the ignition to the same ominous rattling.

He knew he'd been running dangerously low on gas when he got here, but he'd sunk the last of his cash and then some to even make the trip in the first place. Had convinced himself that even in the worst case scenario, he could probably bum a few bucks off his brother to get back on the road.

The shape of the wheel swam in front of him and he sucked in one, two ragged breaths and slammed his fist against the dash. "Fuck!"

Stan dropped his forehead against the cold steering wheel and tried not to think about how tired or how pathetic he was. He could still figure this out, right? How far had the town been when he'd driven through? Maybe if he just waited until morning he could start walking and at least get a canister of gas before he was found out.

It wasn't like it would be the first or last time he slept in his car, after all. This wasn't anything new. Nothing to get all worked up over. Bouncing like a rubber ball off of rock bottom was basically his forte at this point!

But hunched over his steering wheel, he was acutely aware of the ache in his back and limbs. The way the back of his shoulder twinged with pain every time he shifted the wrong way. The throbbing in his head and his chest.

He wasn't even surprised when he spotted tears dripping onto his dirty jeans.

He was, however, surprised when there was a sharp tapping on his window. So surprised, in fact, that he jolted in his seat and sent pain searing through his back again.

“God dammit!” he hissed, ducking to try and scrub his face. He didn’t need to look up to know who was at the door, after all.

And because taking a hint was one of the few things Ford had never learned to fucking do, the rapping came again. Followed immediately by an infuriatingly exasperated voice, muffled behind the glass. “Stanley, would you just come back inside?”

“I told ya I was leaving!” he snapped without lifting his head.

He could practically *hear* the eye roll.

“And here you still are, loitering in front of the house,” Ford said. And a moment later, when Stan refused to budge, “It’s freezing and the roads are bound to be a mess. It won’t kill you to wait until morning.”

Stan swallowed, hard, but he knew it was as close to an olive branch as he would get. Ford had to know he was stranded out here, but not saying so outright was the smallest sliver of mercy, and just enough to keep his jagged pride from falling fully apart.

Ford stepped back when he shoved the door open, and while he looked Stan briefly over, he didn’t comment on whatever he saw.

Stan wasn’t sure if that was a relief or not, but he followed him back inside all the same. He hesitated just inside the door, though, hovering awkwardly after he pressed it shut.

It took Ford a moment to realize that he hadn’t followed him further into the house, and he leaned back around the corner with a frown. “Well? Come on.”

“Come on for *what?* ” Stan groused, even as he made his way across the room and further into the cabin after him.

The rest of the place, what he passed through and could see in the dark, had the same weird decor and disheveled vibe as what he’d caught glimpses of when he came in earlier that day. Jars of oddities, little statues and tchotchkes, and a truly ungodly number of sticky notes were dotted against every other surface.

It had, unfortunately, suited the squirrely, ragged version of his brother who had met him earlier in the day with a crossbow.

Now…it wasn’t that all the weird shit on every table and shelf didn’t suit Ford, because of course it did. But Ford himself seemed too put together for the chaotic, unkempt state of the place. Like he was the only spot that had gotten a spit shine in the whole joint.

It wasn’t until a light was finally flipped on that Stan - after blinking the spots out of his eyes - realized they had made their way into a cluttered kitchen. He stared dumbly as his brother crouched down and dug around under the sink, muttering to himself about how he was *sure* this is where he’d kept it before he left.

“Ford,” he said, reaching up to rub a hand against his sore and probably bruised face. “What are you doing?”

Ford ignored him just long enough for Stan to feel a tired bristle of annoyance. But before he could snap something that would inevitably start another fight, Ford made a triumphant “aha!” noise and rocked up into his feet, waving a first aid kit in one hand.

Stan stared. “The fuck is that for?”

“Your shoulder. You can’t leave a burn like that untreated.”

Stan knew that was probably right, but it made him bristle regardless. “It’s fine.”

Ford scoffed. “It absolutely is not.”

“I don’t need your help,” Stan snapped.

A look passed over Ford’s face that Stan was pretty sure meant he was trying to wrangle his own temper. He wasn’t sure if he was disappointed or not when he managed to. At this point, fighting was just easier.

“…If you let me help you patch it up, I will tell you about where I’ve been the last thirty years,” he said in a tone that suggested it was exceptionally difficult to make the offer. Or maybe it was hard to not tell him he was being a stubborn idiot.

Either way, Stan was caught up on other details.

“….thirty what?”

Ford walked over to the table, frowning down at the stacks of papers and uncapped pens strewn across it. Stan shuffled awkwardly out of the way when he swept the lot into a crumpled pile and transferred them to the counter.

“Thirty years. That’s why I look like our father.”

Stan opened and closed his mouth a few times.

Logic told him his brother had lost his marbles. But the wrinkles and the grays were pretty damn obvious up close and less easily explained. Still…

“What are you yappin’ about?! Ford, you were gone for like fifteen, twenty minutes! Max!”

Ford set the first aid kit down on the now clear table and started rummaging through it, picking through an assortment of little bottles and tubes and bandages. “In this dimension, yes. There must be some sort of time dilation field on the other side. Perhaps it’s unstable, since I don’t recall Fiddleford experiencing anything similar, but additional testing is beyond us now.”

Stan stared, again, hovering next to the table. He knew most of those words, but for some reason the order Ford was saying them in didn’t make any sense. So he asked the next best

thing.

“Is that a gun?” he blurted out.

Ford, who had stopped picking through the first aid kit, paused int he middle of shrugging out of his stupid cowl and jacket. He looked up and blinked owlishly at Stan for a moment before glancing down to where the fucking space gun was now exposed on his hip.

“Ah. It is,” he said, pulling it out of its holster after a notable hesitation and setting it and his cowl aside with the papers. “Take your shirt off and sit down.”

It was Stan’s turn to blink dumbly at his brother. “What?”

Ford shot him an exasperated look and pulled out the chair he’d draped his jacket over. “I can’t treat your shoulder properly through a hole in your jacket, Stanley,” he said, ignoring when Stan scowled at his ‘stop being stupid’ tone.

For a moment they stared silently at each other, Stan openly annoyed and Ford impatiently expectant.

Stan covered being the one to look away first by scoffing and shrugging out of his jacket more roughly than he probably should have if the flare in his shoulder was anything to go by.

“So you’re telling me you somehow magically spent thirty years in that thing even though it hasn’t been an hour since you fell through here? Seriously?”

Ford crossed his arms across chest, and without his own coat, Stan didn’t really have a choice but to notice how…broad he was under his dark sweater. When the hell did his scrawny ass brother get so wide?

“Essentially, yes. Believe me, you aren’t the only one who’s surprised,” Ford said, muttering the last bit nearly to himself.

“Kinda hard to believe, Poindexter,” Stan pointed out, finally moving to tug off his threadbare t-shirt. And if he noticed that Ford immediately turned to mess around at the sink, he felt absolutely nothing whatsoever about it.

Mostly, he was just fucking cold, so he kept his beanie tugged firmly down around his ears.

“Jesus, Ford, if I’m gonna be half naked in your kitchen, can you at least turn the damn heat on?” he groused, turning around the chair Ford had pulled out so he could straddle it.

He folded his arms over the dark coat hanging off the back and dropped his chin there. Sweet Moses, he was tired. It wasn’t much warmer in the kitchen than it had been in his car, and straddling the kitchen chair wasn’t much more comfortable than being hunched over the wheel. But there was something to be said for being inside with a locked door between him and everyone that was currently out for his blood.

Well. Almost everyone.

“If I remember correctly, the heat had been shut off shortly before you arrived,” Ford said, inspecting a glass he’d pulled out of the cabinet.

“*You* had your heat turned off? The hell, Ford?”

“I’m fairly certain I forgot to pay the gas company,” Ford said, pursing his lips a bit. “I wasn’t…in the best state of mind this winter.”

Stan snorted at that. “Yeah, no shit,” he said.

Ford made a funny little face that disappeared when he turned his head, but he didn’t elaborate, and he didn’t look up from his new study of the…soap at the sink? Stan didn’t have much else to do but sit there and wait.

He briefly considered rifling through the pockets of Ford’s coat, and in any other scenario he probably would have. But the position was kinda awkward to get anything into his jeans, and his own jacket was tossed out of reach on the table, so he wouldn’t have as easy of a time keeping anything he found hidden. And now that they’d stumbled into this tentative truce, Stan didn’t actually want to upend the whole thing by getting caught going through Ford’s shit.

But just because he wasn’t digging around through the coat didn’t mean he was ignoring it entirely. It was kind of hard to, honestly, considering he could feel it under his arms and brushing against his knees. But more than that was the fact that sitting this close, it was impossible to deny the fact that it *smelled* like Ford. And it was the strangest fucking thing.

It was almost familiar, tickling at memories in the back of his head that sounded like seagulls and ocean waves and reminded him of hot sand and hotter sunburns and being happy. That was a thing smells were supposed to do, right? Make you remember stuff? He was pretty sure that was the case, at least.

But it also smelled the way the static in the basement had tasted and like something that was almost motor oil but not exactly. The best way Stan could think to describe it was like someone cooking your favorite food but using too much spice; it was almost exactly right, but you knew it would taste wrong. It was…weird. And for some stupid reason that made him *feel* weird. So he tried not to think about it.

Luckily, he was jolted out of thinking about how Ford’s coat smelled (Jesus, he needed to get some sleep after this) by the sound of running water. Feeling a little untethered, Stan watched Ford’s back, realizing a touch belatedly that he was washing his hands. And when he caught a glimpse of corded forearms where Ford must have pushed his sleeves up, he had the dizzying thought, *That doesn’t even look like your brother from the back.*

Hell, it almost startled him when Ford turned around. But Stan shook the feeling off, and a moment later Ford walked back to the table with a hand towel, a full cup of water and some soap. And after he deposited it all on the table, he dragged another chair around to Stan’s side.

“All right, luckily for us, it doesn’t look as if anything in the first aid kit has expired yet and we should have just enough to patch this up for the night,” Ford said, taking a seat slightly behind the shoulder that Stan had started to forget was hurting at all.

Stan made a short noise to indicate that he’d heard and watched as Ford wetted the towel and dispensed a pump of soap onto the material. Oh, this was probably gonna suck.

“Hold still,” Ford said shortly, and Stan had only a moment to brace himself before the back of his shoulder lit up with fire again.

He managed to keep from lurching off the other side of the chair, but only just, biting out an emphatic, “Fuck!” instead.

“If you’d patched it right away, I wouldn’t need to clean it,” Ford said, and Stan shot a scowl over his shoulder.

“If you hadn’t kicked me into that fucking box in the first place, I wouldn’t need it at all!” He snapped.

Ford pursed his lips again but at least seemed to concede the point there. Good. Prick.

Didn’t make the next minute of terry cloth and soap being rubbed on his shrieking shoulder any better, but Stan had gotten pretty good at “grit your teeth and bear it,” so that’s what he did. He did sag a little harder against the chair and the coat that sort-of-smelled-like-Ford-and-sort-of-didn’t when it was over, though.

“The ointment shouldn’t be as bad,” Ford offered, his tone almost apologetic as he swiped soap suds off his shoulder and finally set the towel aside. At least in the aftermath, the water still clinging to his skin was cool, and *that* part was nice.

Stan sighed and dropped his forehead against his arms, letting Ford mutter over ointment options from the kit without comment. He probably would have just slapped a Band-Aid on himself and called it a day, but whatever. It wasn’t the worst thing in the world, having someone else to patch up a spot that would’ve been a pain to reach on his own.

As a matter of fact, in the lull, Stan very nearly started dozing off, throbbing shoulder and all. That was probably why he didn’t realize right away how still and quiet Ford had gotten. It wasn’t until fingers brushed against his shoulder - the *opposite* shoulder - that he blinked his eyes back open and reluctantly lifted his head.

“Done already, Sixer?” He asked. He didn’t feel a bandage or anything on his bad shoulder, but maybe he’d nodded off for longer than he’d initially noticed.

“What is this?”

The tone of Ford’s voice had him shaking off the rest of his drowsiness quickly. His voice was tight, like he was angry and trying not to be. Or at least trying not to make it obvious that he was. What the fuck did he have to be mad about back there? What could Stan have possibly done in the…what? Two minutes since he’d dozed off.

”Gonna need more information than that,” he pointed out, annoyance bubbling quickly back to the surface.

“You have—“ Ford cut himself off with a hard breath, and Stan sat upright so he could look over his shoulder at him.

“What the hell are you yappin’ about, Ford?” he demanded, frowning at the expression on Ford’s face — he looked like a damn pufferfish. But Ford wasn’t looking at him. Well, he was, but not at Stan’s face. He was looking at something near Stan’s waist now, nostrils honest to god *flaring*.

Dumbfounded, Stan looked down as well. The hell was he supposed to be looking at? He tried to see what Ford’s was seeing, taking in the dirty jeans and the scrape against one side from rolling around on the floor. None of that seemed all that interesting. Neither did the gut folding over the button of his jeans or the bruise curling over his hi—

“Oh. Oh, you’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” Stan said, barking out a laugh before he could stop himself.

Ford’s eyes, still narrow and now breathtakingly familiar, snapped up to his face.

”No,” Stan said, holding a hand up. “Stop making that damn face. You don’t get to give me that look anymore.”

Because he recognized it now: *jealousy.* Clear as day on Ford’s vaguely unfamiliar face. He looked down at his own shoulder to check and, sure enough, there was another bruise there. A bite mark, to be exact. Made sense seeing how it was a matching pair with the fingerprints bruised against his hip.

“Who was it?” Ford asked anyway, like he had any right to, and Stan laughed again.

“None of your damn business, that’s who!” Stan said, twisting enough to shove a finger into Ford’s pissy, angry face. “It’s been over ten years, Stanford. Who I’m fucking doesn’t have anything to do with you, anymore!”

Of all the things he expected to come up during this visit, this wasn’t even on the list.

Sure, there had been a time when he’d thrilled in getting that look out of Ford. When he’d sidle up to Carla McCorkle during the day to make her giggle and slap his arm. And later in the evening, make his usually awkward brother hiss lewd, possessive nonsense against the back of his ear.

But that had been a lifetime ago, and seeing Ford puff up like he used to as a jealous, horny teenager just made Stan angry.

Definitely just angry.

Ford gave the finger in his face a withering look, and a muscle jumped in his jaw. “Is that why you were in such a hurry to storm out? Running back to whoever you’re fucking nowadays?”

Stan couldn't help it. It wasn't *funny*, any of it really, but he laughed again. "*What?* Are you kiddin' me?"

"These look fresh," Ford said, ears pink and expression sour. "Is he waiting in town?"

"No, Stanford," he drawled, slow, like he was speaking to a child. "The trick I fucked for gas money didn't roadtrip up with me to see my estranged twin brother."

It took Stan a moment to realize why Ford's suddenly looked so stricken.

"…Oh, god dammit," he muttered, reaching up to rub a hand over his face. He hadn't actually meant to tell him that yet. Hell, he hadn't meant to tell him that *ever* if he could avoid it.

When Ford didn't say anything, Stan did. He couldn't stand the weight of the silence pressing in around them. "Look, are we done here?"

But when he tried to stand, Ford's hand came down on his shoulder - with the bite, not the burn - and pressed him back down.

"No, we are not. It isn't even bandaged yet, Stanley," Ford said, sounding exasperated and tense but not openly angry anymore. Stan suspected he was just keeping a lid on it, knowing Ford, but he reasoned that it was better than the alternative, whatever that may have been.

Honestly, he'd expected some yelling, maybe some insults, and potentially being thrown back out to his currently-useless car.

When none of that seemed forthcoming, he tentatively folded his arms across Ford's coat and set his cheek down again. He wouldn't say he relaxed, exactly, sitting too tense for that, but he stayed put and watched Ford grab whichever tube he'd decided on off the table.

When cream covered fingertips rubbed over his shoulder, Stan hissed.

To his credit, Ford lifted his fingers briefly off the burn, and they were gentler when they returned. Thankfully, the ointment didn't smart for long, leaving a more lingering cool than the water, and Ford's fingers were less abrasive than the cloth.

Stan sighed softly against his own arm when the ache finally seemed to be subsiding a bit. It would hurt like hell in the morning, he suspected, but he'd take his breaks where he could. And it was a relief when Ford taped a piece of gauze over the spot — you don't notice how much just the damn air shifting against a burn hurts until it's covered.

He startled, however, when more ointment covered fingers came down on his skin, this time meticulously tracing over the bruise of teeth on his other shoulder.

Stan cleared his throat and tried not to shift in his chair. "You don't— you don't have'ta do that."

"When did you get this?" Ford asked instead, ignoring him as he continued to rub cream over the tender bruise. He wasn't nearly as gentle as he'd been with the burn.

Stan thought about lying, and he thought about telling Ford to fuck off again. But at this point he was just too tired to care. And it was his own damn fault for saying as much as he had. Estranged or not, he knew how Ford got when he was after data.

”Last night. Needed gas outside of Salt Lake City or somewhere around there.”

He heard Ford take a measured breath, but he didn’t look. He wasn’t sure what he’d see if he did.

Worse, he wasn’t sure what he *wanted* to see.

The ointment tube hit the table with a clatter that sounded deafening in the silence that had overtaken the kitchen. But whatever Stan had been expecting to follow, it honestly hadn’t been another piece of gauze being taped down over the glorified hickey. It seemed so absurd that he couldn’t stop a half strangled laugh from bubbling out of him.

Ford wasn’t nearly as amused if the hand closing over his bruised hip was anything to go by, and any of Stan’s nervous amusement shrank down into another hiss when his brother pressed hard against the vague impression of fingertips already marked against his skin. For a wild second, the only thing he could think about was how much larger Ford’s hand felt than the trucker’s who’d paid the rest of his way to Oregon.

“Did you at least use protection?” Ford wondered aloud, suddenly close enough that Stan could feel his breath against his ear.

It was almost like they were sixteen again, crammed together in the back of the El Diablo on a dark side street because there were too many people at home. Ford used to drill him — *hah* — like this after he’d riled him up at school or some event. Sometimes even when Stan hadn’t been trying to get under Ford’s skin at all.

If Vinny Bianchi clapped his shoulder too many times leaving the gym, or if he held a door open for Nancy Summers when she was dressed too cute, there was bound to be Ford against his ear, demanding to know what else had happened. What else Stan had thought about happening.

He definitely should lie.

”Pays better if ya don’t,” he said with a shrug that was entirely too casual for the situation.

He sucked in a sharp breath when Ford’s other large hand tangled in the hair at the back of his neck and forced his head up off of his arms. He was pretty sure Ford was still in his own chair, but he could feel him leaning in, the heat of him against his back.

“So you drove all the way from Utah to Gravity Falls, to see me, with another man’s ejaculate inside of you?”

Stan snorted. “Seriously? Ejaculate?”

Ford gave his fistful of hair a sharp enough tug that Stan had to bite back a noise, unsure of what exactly was going to come out if he didn’t get his teeth in front of it.

“Answer the question, Stanley,” he said against his ear. And Sweet Moses, the extra gravel Ford had picked up in his voice doing whatever the hell he’d been doing in the portal was. Well, it was really working for him.

“No, brainiac,” he said, turning his head the little he could in Ford’s grip to smirk at him. “He jizzed on my back.”

The angle was terrible, but Ford still yanked him back into a kiss that was mostly teeth, digging his fingers against his hip like he planned to cover the old bruises with new ones of his own. Actually, Stan knew Ford well enough that he was pretty sure that’s exactly what he was doing.

And what could *he* do, really, but soften his mouth and let Ford take out his irritation on his lower lip?

It wasn’t as if he could push him away. Not again. Not after everything.

Not when Ford still *wanted* him.

And when the most immediate flare of his temper subsided, Ford softened the kiss. Still demanding, because Ford was always demanding when he knew what he wanted. But less gnashing teeth and more something Stan could actually reciprocate, space for him to press his own tongue up against the one trying to map out his soft palate.

Stan panted when Ford finally leaned back, neck a little sore from the angle of being tongue fucked over his shoulder. Up close, it was a lot easier to make out all the weird similarities and differences in Ford’s face. The way his lips were the same shape, but he had more lines around them and a little scar against the lower. How his eyes were the same color but the crows feet were new, and the brows framing them were gray.

A thought that he probably should have had way earlier than now struck Stan suddenly: was this *actually* Ford? It sounded mostly like him, and it looked mostly like him, but maybe he’d let the whole thing go a little too easily. Freaky space portals were one thing, but time travel on top of that?

Then again, who else but Ford had ever given a single shit about who he fucked?

The smart thing to do would be to talk about it. Ford had promised to tell him what the fuck had happened on the other side of that portal, after all, and he’d barely said a damn thing about it since they sat own. And dealing with maybe even a tiny bit of their bullshit would be a long time coming. He could confirm that the unjustly hot, silver fox version of his brother was, in fact, his brother and not just some aged up look-alike alien that really dug the homeless hooker aesthetic.

Then again, not once in his damn life had anyone accused Stanley Pines of being smart.

He just hoped that when he crushed his mouth against Ford’s again that it didn’t actually come across as desperate as it felt.

Ford made a low sound against his lips, and a moment later Stan was being hauled backwards, damn near into Ford's chair if not his lap. The pressure against his newly patched up burn wasn't amazing, but the easier access to Ford's mouth and the half chub he could feel against his ass definitely was.

Talking had never been kinetic enough for the Pines twins, after all. It had always been easier to fight about it. Or, later, to fuck about it. Seemed like the logical progression of whatever the hell this visit was turning out to be.

When Ford let go of his hair to curl six fingers around his jaw and angle his head where he wanted him, Stan went without a fuss. And when Ford quit squeezing his sore hip to start squeezing his chest and nipple, Stan moaned like a damn whore. He might've been embarrassed about it, too, if he couldn't feel Sixer's dick twitching behind him.

Suddenly warm in places other than his shoulder and desperate to get his own hands on him, Stan let go of the chair and fumbled blindly until he got two handfuls of Ford's thighs to squeeze. For good measure, he canted his hips back, grinding his ass against Ford's lap and grinning when he pulled away from the kiss to gasp.

"Still tuckin' to the left, Sixer?" He teased, rolling his hips again and laughing at the bitten off noise Ford made for it.

He really should have expected it when Ford dropped his hand to grab him through his jeans a moment later.

"Seems you haven't changed your habits, either," he murmured, a little breathless and a lot of gravel against his temple.

"F-Fuck," Stan groaned tilting his chin out of Ford's hand to watch the other groping between his thighs, hips stuttering up to meet him.

"That is the plan, Stanley," Ford assured him, and there was no way he didn't feel the shudder that ran up Stan's spine, not plastered against it like he was.

Ford reached up and dragged the beanie off of his head, tossing it somewhere in the direction Stan remembered leaving his jacket. He had half a mind to bitch about his ears being cold before fingers were pushing their way into his hair, grabbing hard enough to send sparks running over his scalp.

If Ford cared that he hadn't washed it in two days (which, frankly, the fact that he'd bothered to wash it at all before leaving New Mexico was more effort than he usually bothered with), he didn't say. And, Stan noted, when he tugged his head to the side, baring the side of his throat for Ford's mouth, it was at an angle where he could still watch Ford's hand palming his thigh and his dick through the denim.

Then Ford's teeth sank into the juncture of his shoulder hard enough that he may have broken skin, and Stan yelped, reaching up to give Ford's hair a retaliatory yank.

"J-Jesus, Ford! You get turned into a fuckin' vampire in portal town, too?!"

”Oh, please, I didn’t bite you that hard,” Ford protested, sounding so damn petulant that Stan couldn’t believe he’d ever doubted that this idiot was anyone *but* his brother.

“Like hell you didn’t! Don’cha think I’ve got enough shoulder injuries for one goddamn day?”

When Ford remained quiet for a beat too long, Stan tried to turn his head, hissing when the grip in his hair didn’t lighten up enough to let him. Well, two could play at that game, and he tugged Ford’s hair again harder in return, pleased to hear his grunt of discomfort.

“Did you seriously bite me that hard just to one up the bruise I already got?!”

“Yes,” Ford said, blunt now that he’d already been called out. And damn if that didn’t…kinda do it for him a little bit.

Ford slid his hand up from his crotch to squeeze Stan’s hip again, digging his fingertips and the blunt half moons of his nails against the bruise there until it ached. “I’ll replace this one, too. And then when they heal, only mine will be left.”

Okay, maybe that was kinda doing it for him a lotta bit.

Stan wet his lower lip, voice sticking in his throat when he tried to speak. Ford loosened the words up for him with another sharp tug at his hair and a bitchy, condescending little “Hmm?” that had no business being as hot as it was.

“A-And then?” Stan managed, fingers slipping out of Ford’s hair to curl into the sweater over his shoulder.

“And then?” Ford repeated, fingers trailing away from Stan’s hip to drag across his stomach.

”Yeah,” Stan said, trying to bring the tease or at least some steel back into his voice. Anything to offset how pathetic he sounded. “Y’know. When those’re gone too.”

Ford’s fingers stilled, and Stan winced. He should’ve kept his damn mouth shut. But noooo, nothing would do but for him to fuck up a good thing by trying to take more than he deserved. Only he could yap his way out of a possessive pity-fuck.

He was trying to come up with some kind of joke to turn things back around when Ford leaned in, pressing his lips against the shell of his ear, and dammit if Stan couldn’t help but shiver again for it.

“Then I suppose I’ll just have to replace them, too.”

Heat punched into his gut, and Stanley was left desperately trying to swallow around his suddenly dry mouth.

“Th-That–” he cleared his throat and tried again. “That sounds like a plan.”

He could feel the curl of Ford’s smile against his skin, and it took an embarrassing amount of effort not to whine over it.

“Let’s get you out of these,” Ford said, plucking pointedly at the button of Stan’s jeans. “Up you get.”

Stan nodded, but it took a moment for the words to actually register, and he wasn’t as steady on his feet as he’d like to be when he finally managed to get disentangled from Ford and the kitchen chairs.

Thankfully, he didn’t have to hold himself upright for long at all. Ford stood up behind him, the chair squealing briefly against the linoleum, and then there was a warm palm and six fingers sliding up his spine. When they reached the place between his shoulder blades and pressed, well, Stan didn’t even have to think about it. He bent at the waist and let Sixer fold him over the table.

“Didn’t even want me to suck your dick a little?” Stan teased, once he found his tongue in working order again.

“I can throat fuck you later,” Ford said with so much casual confidence that there would a) be a later and b) that he would be fucking Stan’s throat in that self-assured “later,” that Stan in the present had the sudden very intense desire to squirm against the table.

“Sure,” he said, aiming to match Ford’s casual confidence and landing somewhere in the realm of breathless, over eager slut instead. “That sounds nice.”

Ford sounded like he was smiling when he finally reached around and yanked the button of Stan’s jeans open with more force than the easy, playful tone of his voice would suggest. “It does, doesn’t it?”

“O-Oh, yeah,” Stan started babbling, groaning faintly when his zipper was tugged down and some of the biting pressure was let off his dick. “I’ve got way better at it, too. Barely gag no more – you’ll see.”

“Any more,” Ford corrected tartly, because of course he did, and there was no build up or fanfare before Stan felt his jeans and boxers both being shoved unceremoniously down to his knees. Thankfully, he was running hot enough that the chill of the stupid, heatless house didn’t do much beyond make himself shiver.

But he did have a moment to fully appreciate that he was face down, ass up over the kitchen table, and very nearly said some stupid shit like “Dinner is served!” but he managed to keep that one to himself. Not because it wasn’t really fucking funny, because it was – he was hilarious – but because Stan kind of wanted to enjoy getting railed before he started thinking too much about how, Christ, he was hungry.

If there was a single edible thing in this bizarro shack, he could probably convince Ford to split it with him after.

Stan was ripped pretty quickly away from thinking about *not* thinking about food when Ford’s hands were suddenly squeezing and then pulling apart his ass cheeks.

“Jesus, Sixer!” he said, feeling cold air on his asshole and heat crawling up the back of his neck. “Getting right to the point back there?”

Ford made a completely neutral humming sound behind him and then nothing else.

Even before he got used to putting out when ends just weren’t meeting, Stan wouldn’t have ever considered himself to be particularly shy or bashful. So it was an uncomfortably novel sensation that swept through his stomach and heated his face alongside the more familiar bite of good ol’ fashioned embarrassment when he realized what Ford was probably seeing.

Not that he was all that familiar with what his hole looked like on a regular basis or anything, either, but he was still just tender enough that the words ‘puffy’ and ‘recently fucked’ came to mind.

The silence wasn’t helping anything either.

Stan managed to swallow whatever noise tried crawling up his throat, but he couldn’t help but give into the squirming at that point. It had the desired effect of getting Ford to loosen his grip on his ass, at least. But a moment later, Stan gasped when Ford‘s hand came down in a short, sharp slap instead.

“Stop that,” he admonished, running his hand over Stan’s hip and squeezing over the bruise there for good measure, and damn if it didn’t make Stan’s dick twitch anyway. “It wouldn’t kill you to at least try to be good by holding still, Stanley.”

Oh.

Well that hit him like an ice pick, sliding between his ears and chipping out most of Stan’s higher processing power, whatever there was of it. The rest of it - the embarrassment, the bashfulness, the discomfort - all flaked away under the sharp pointed chance at *good.*

Yeah, he was a chronic fuck up, but Ford made it sound easy enough.

Suddenly desperately intent on proving himself, Stan held himself as still as he was able, puffing out an unsteady breath against the wood under his head when Ford squeezed his ass and pulled his cheeks apart again. He didn’t have any quips this time, but he did moan when the warm, dry pad of Ford’s thumb rubbed against the twitching rim of his hole.

“Much better,” Ford said, and the heat of his approval turned Stan’s bones into molasses. Made it a lot easier to hold still under whatever inspection Ford was intent on completing when all his limbs had been filled with thick sugar.

Stan’s breath hitched when the tip of Ford’s thumb pressed inward. A dry finger fucking wasn’t ever exactly comfortable, but he clenched eagerly around on the intrusion anyway for Ford. Because it *was* Ford.

And behind him, Ford groaned.

“That’s very good, Stanley,” he said, sounding breathless in a way that Stan would have found familiar and endearing if he wasn’t short circuiting.

Ford thrust his thumb shallowly in and out of him several more times, and Stan was pretty sure he was making some kind of awful, whiny sound because of it, and there was definitely pre drooling down his dick. But all of that was secondary to the thick, syrupy feeling oozing between his ears.

Then Ford was leaning over his back, teeth against his throat and the scratch of his sweater against his back. And even when the heat of him made his shoulder thrum uncomfortably, Stan moaned.

It took an astronomical effort to remember how to connect his brain and his tongue again.

”I— I got lube,” he slurred against the table, making a displeased sound when Ford stopped biting hickeys against his throat and slid his thumb out of him.

“Where?” Ford demanded.

Stan tilted his head and managed to spot the red shape of his jacket within reach, overcoming the heaviness in his limbs enough to reach out and drag it closer. It was honestly a relief when Ford plucked it from his hands. “Left pocket.”

”Mm. You’re nearly out,” Ford said, voice terse and a pinched look on his face when Stan looked back over his shoulder at him.

“Yeah,” he agreed, smirking. “Wanna use up the last of it?”

Ford glanced between him and the lube, and Stan nearly laughed when he cleared his throat and reached up to adjust his glasses. That was a yes.

Naturally, Ford didn’t admit as much, but he did pour cold lube directly into the crack of his ass, making Stan hiss.

“Y’know that shit’s about as cold as your kitchen, right?” he griped.

“You did suggest I use it all,” Ford pointed out, reaching down to follow the trail of lube with his fingers before pressing two in without preamble. ”And it hardly feels as if you need that much after last night.”

“F— *fuck!* ” Stan groaned, turning to push his forehead against the table as he bucked onto Ford’s fingers.

“Language, Stanley,” Ford chided, pulling his fingers out. Stan heard the squirt of more lube being dispensed, and then there were three slick fingers stretching him open.

“Are you s-serious?” Stan panted, gritting his teeth and groping under the table to get a hand on his neglected dick to offset the burn of being stretched back open so fast. He cursed again when Ford’s free hand caught him by the wrist and growled in annoyance when he felt him leaning over his back again.

“I thought you were going to be good for me, Stanley?” Ford said, smothering Stan’s agitation as easily as blowing out a candle. “You can do that, can’t you?”

He punctuated the question with a harsh stab of his fingers, driving straight into his prostate. Stan choked, nodding against the wood grain and babbling before any conscious part of his brain could catch up.

“I can. C-Course I can, Sixer,” he said, voice going reedy when Ford jabbed his fingers in again.

“Then stay put for me,” Ford said, and Stan whined but didn’t fight him when his hand was pulled up and set back on the table.

“C-Can I have your jacket?” Stan blurted out.

There was confused silence from behind him for a moment. But before he had a chance to regret asking and scramble together a joke or an apology, Ford shifted, and a moment later the dark coat was dropped on the table by his head.

Stan was pretty sure he started to say ‘thank you’ as he dragged the jacket close to his face, breathing in that over-spiced scent, but Ford’s fingers drilled hard against his prostate a few more times, and he shouted wordlessly into the material instead. By the time Ford slid his fingers out again, Stan felt ready to vibrate out of his skin, clinging to Ford’s coat like some kinda lifeline.

The denim around his knees was chafing, and he was pretty sure his dick was leaking onto the floor between his boots. But he stayed where he’d been put while the sweat building against the back of his neck and between his shoulders left a chill against his skin in the cold kitchen.

It was the sound of Ford finally yanking his own pants open that made him shiver.

More lube, and the objectively hilarious sound of the last of it followed by a lotta air being spit out of the bottle and into Ford’s hand. He really wanted to turn around and watch Ford slick himself up, see if he could spot as many obvious differences on his brother’s dick as he had his face. But he’d been told to stay put, and he was trying to be good here, so he didn’t move, soothing himself with the gauzy promise of “later” for that.

And then Ford was rubbing his dick along the cleft of his ass, and Stan whimpered like a chick in a bad porno.

Ford let out an unsteady breath behind him. Fingers slid up his back to tangle into his mullet again, and Stab arched when his head was pulled off the table by that grip a moment later. The head of Ford’s dick was nudging against his hole but not pushing in, just enough pressure to tease.

Stan’s thighs shook with the effort to keep from rocking back and just impaling himself.

“Stanford,” he panted, fisting his hands in Ford’s coat. “Sixer, *please.*”

Ford groaned and grabbed his bruised hip with a strength he may have flinched away from if he weren’t already so strung out on heat and just-out-of-reach pleasure. But then he finally,

finally rocked his hips and started filling him properly, and as far as Stan was concerned, Ford could bruise whatever the hell he wanted. He made a punched out sound and dropped his head as much as he could with Ford's fist in his hair, enjoying the pull against his scalp.

Behind him, Ford's voice had gone low and gravel-rough. "Oh, you look perfect like this, sweetheart."

Faster than he could brace himself against it, that hot syrup feeling flash flooded Stan's brain. It rushed in and coated all the urgent heat in his skin and the ache in his dick under something thicker and sweeter. Something that would be nice to drown in.

There wasn't room for anything else in his head or mouth other than *Ford, Ford, Ford* after that.

It took Ford no time at all to pick up a punishing rhythm, and Stan whined and moaned through it, happy to take anything Ford would give him. He did his best to keep pace, but his brain may as well have been turned into a waffle for all he could coordinate.

When his head was pressed back down to the table, he was happy to rub his cheek against the jacket there waiting for him. But when Ford tried to pull his fingers away, Stan fumbled blindly to stop him, getting a clumsy grip on his hand and squeezing. He couldn't figure out how to make most words anymore, so he just said the one he knew.

"F-Ford!"

And Ford, always too smart for his own good, seemed to understand. He adjusted their grip, pressing his palm to the back of Stan's hand and lacing all of their fingers together as he pressed it back down to the table. The gentle squeeze of his hand was a sharp counterpoint to the pounding of his hips, fucking into Stan so hard the momentum was dragging his nipples against the table. It was just one more sharp point being steadily eroded in his syrup saturated brain.

He didn't even feel when Ford let go of his hip, but he keened into the jacket when six fingers curled around his dick.

"You're doing so well, Stanley," Ford panted against his shoulder, mouthing at the bite mark he'd left earlier. "You're being s-so good for me."

Stan shook.

He jerked and made a noise that hurt his throat, and he didn't come so much as his orgasm tore through him.

Stan was vaguely aware of Ford's thrusts losing their rhythm, going jerky and uncoordinated, but it and the ensuing pulse of warmth spilling inside of him were distant, muffled sensations. He clutched at the fingers curled around his hand and dredged every working cell of his brain together to lean in and press a lopsided kiss against Ford's thumb.

Then he may have blacked out. Or maybe fell asleep a little. Details, shmetails. The point was that Stan was definitely touch and go for a few minutes there, blinking his eyes open every so often, but not trying all that hard to make anything out in his blurry vision or to think through the warm static filling his head. He was aware of Ford moving around, touching him, probably yapping about something, but he felt underwater, and everything else was still muffled, eroded and distorted by liquid before it reached him.

Stan bobbed above the surface a few times here and there. The first time he lifted his too-heavy head and squinting around the kitchen, it took a moment before he realized things looked different because he'd been moved. He was propped up sideways on one of the kitchen chairs, leaning his unburned shoulder against the back, and Ford's jacket was tucked around him. The shape of Ford materialized in front of him, and he blinked dumbly at his brother's sweater and the still-open fly of his pants.

When the rim of a glass was pressed against his lower lip, he drank whatever was being offered to him without question. And when six fingers petted through his hair, he tipped his head towards them and slipped under again.

The next time he resurfaced, it was to the feeling of being jostled. But it was so damn dark when he opened his eyes that he just closed them again. Eventually he was able to make out the feeling of Ford's sweater against his cheek, of arms around him, and he had a delirious moment to wonder, *When was the last time anyone hugged me?,* before the fact that Ford was carrying him caught up.

"Fuck," he slurred, turning his head against Ford's shoulder and forcing his tongue to mostly cooperate. "When did'ya get s'strong, Poindexter?"

Ford chuckled faintly underneath him, something he could feel as much as he could hear, and it just made the warm, syrup tide in his head stronger. He didn't hear whatever Ford said after that.

Then he was sitting again. It was still dark, but he forced himself to keep his eyes mostly-open this time until he could track down Ford. Thankfully, there was enough ambient light in the room, spilling in from some window, for him to make out the fuzzy, Ford-shape kneeling by his feet. His bare feet.

Stan stared and wiggled his toes against the rug under them. When the hell had he lost his boots?

The Ford-shape straightened up with a quiet, old-man groan that made Stan snicker.

"Yes, ha ha, my joints aren't what they used to be," Ford said dryly. But then he cupped a hand against his cheek, and Stan leaned into it with a sigh. He managed to stay afloat this time, though, and he made another quiet, pleased sound when Ford's thumb stroked the skin there lightly. "How are you feeling?"

"Hmm?" Stan didn't realize he'd closed his eyes again until he had to open them, glancing up towards Ford. He couldn't make out anything in Ford's expression, not in the dark while his

eyes were this shitty and his brain was still so sticky. But his voice sounded soft, so Stan just assumed his face was doing something similar. "'M good. Real good Tired."

"You should get some sleep," Ford agreed. "Ah, good, there's a blanket in here."

Ford tried to take the jacket off his shoulders, and Stan shrunk back from him in protest, grabbing at the edges to keep it. Ford sighed and rolled his eyes for that – Stan couldn't see it, but he *knew* Ford was rolling his eyes at him.

"Fine, fine, sleep in the thing," Ford said, sounding exasperated but also a little fond, and then there was a blanket being draped around him and the jacket, which was nice.

What was less nice was when Ford pulled away like he was going to leave, and Stan nearly knocked the jacket and blanket both off to lurch after him, grabbing for Ford's arm and catching his sleeve.

"Stanley?"

"Don't go," he said, tugging. "I– I just got'ya back.."

Ford was quiet for a moment, and Stan was teetering too close to passing back out to care if he'd just gone and embarrassed himself again. What was one more for the night, huh?

But then Ford shifted back towards the…couch? Was he on a couch? Stan heard shuffling and could just make out shoes being kicked off, before Ford sighed and got onto the probably-a-couch next to him.

"There's really not enough room for both of us," he pointed out, shifting around a few times before Stan got tired of waiting and just wedged himself between Ford's legs and leaned into him until Ford laid back with a grumble.

Sure, he was right. There really wasn't enough room for two grown men to sleep comfortably on a couch. But with Ford's chest under his ear and the jacket and blanket being tugged back up over his shoulder, it was probably the warmest he'd been since he got here. And it was hardly the most uncomfortable place he'd ever slept.

"Y'know, you still owe me," Stan realized when he was halfway back to sleep.

"Excuse me?"

Stan made a small, amused sound, and shifted to tuck an arm around Ford's stupid, trim waist, wiggling his fingers until he managed to get them under his shirt and against warm skin. Ford jolted.

"Your fingers are *cold*, Stanley," he admonished when Stan laughed at him.

"Yeah, probably 'cause there's no goddamn heat in his house," he pointed out.

Ford huffed. And when he couldn't argue that point, he changed the subject. "What do you think I owe you?" he asked, and there was a faint edge there, like he was steeling himself for

another fight.

“You were gonna tell me what happened over there.”

“Oh,” Ford said dumbly, relaxing under him again. After a moment, fingers started running through his hair again, and Stan sighed softly. “You aren’t even going to be awake long enough to hear any of it if I tell you now.”

Stan shrugged a little, careful not to dislodge his position or the fingers that had started scratching lightly against his scalp, and fuck that felt nice.

“So? You can remind me in the morning. Get t’say ‘I told ya so.’”

Ford chuckled quietly again.

“...All right. I’ll tell you about some of it,” he relented, his voice low as he started explaining the dimension that sat immediately adjacent to the portal. And because Ford was, once again, too smart for his own good, Stan didn’t actually hear any of it.

Later, when words made sense again, he would be baffled and horrified and awed. They’d find more stupid shit to fight about and more serious shit to fuck about, but surely they’d figure *something* sustainable out and start moving forward again.

But for now, Ford’s voice drifted through his ears like soothing nonsense, and the last conscious thought Stan had before he drifted off was that the soft rumble under his cheek weirdly reminded him of his car’s engine.

End Notes

kinda can't believe this is what shook me out of my 6 month writing drought, but hey, i'll take it! this is a side account, because i am 30 or 40 years old and i do not need whatever the fuck pro/anti discourse is on main, but i did want to give back to this incredibly talented little community for keeping us all so well fed. i hope you enjoyed it! ♥

edit: y'all are so damn nice, i caved and am now foodtruckery on tumblr, so feel free to come chat with me!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!